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ABSTRACT

This policy statement provides a framework for thinking about the many issues involved in developing assurance of adequate child care opportunities for infants and toddlers under 3 years of age. Specifically, the statement discusses (1) the special needs of infants and toddlers; (2) public policies to provide both financial and emotional support for parents who remain at home to care for infants and toddlers; (3) professional recognition, certification, and training for caregivers of infants and toddlers; (4) financing, regulating, and accrediting adequate day care and educating consumers; and (5) policy-relevant research issues concerning child care for very young children. It is argued that addressing the child care needs of infants and toddlers and their families is a process that must involve parents; professionals; employers; voluntary, community, and religious groups; and government. National Center staff are available to assist policymakers in locating research and clinical data that will help those seeking approaches to infant and toddler child care. (CB)

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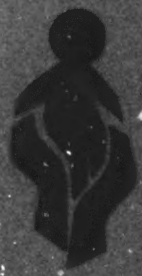

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This special policy statement was prepared under the guidance of the National Center's Committee on Public Policy and Public Education.

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Who Will Mind the Babies?

American infants born today encounter a family environment much different from the one their parents experienced as babies.

- Their mothers are more likely to return to work, if work is available, while the children are very young. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 1982 figures, thirty-eight percent (38%) of women with children under three are currently in the labor force, and the fastest increase in labor force participation rates among women is among mothers with young children. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that by 1990 more than 50% of all mothers with children under six years of age will be working.

- Infants of the eighties are more likely to live in a single parent family. As of 1982, 22% of all American children under 18 were living with a single parent, usually the mother; by 1990, 25% of children under the age of ten will live in a single parent household. The number of children living with a divorced mother more than doubled between 1970 and 1982, while the number living with an unmarried mother increased by a factor of more than five.

- Children under six with employed mothers are more likely to be cared for outside their own home today than in the past, particularly if their mothers work full-time. Even when relatives are caring for the child, the care is increasingly given in the relative's home.

Despite these changes in the world around them, today's infants and toddlers, as we know, have the

same *needs* babies have always had. To develop their inborn capacities, young children need:

- adequate nutrition
- safe shelter
- appropriate health care and supervision
- nurturing by familiar adults who are responsive to the uniqueness of the individual child from the moment of birth.

Although children may survive and surmount adversity and use opportunities for growth throughout their lives, consistent, appropriate care in the earliest years is what builds a solid foundation for healthy development and productive achievement. Finding approaches to caring for children which will both promote the development of the child and strengthen the family as the primary source of nurturance for young children is a challenge facing parents, families, community agencies, employers, and government at every level.

This paper, prepared by the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs (a non-profit, tax-exempt organization working to promote the healthy development of infants, toddlers and their families) provides a framework for thinking about the many policy issues involved in developing assurance of adequate child care opportunities for infants and toddlers under three.

It discusses:

- the special needs of infants and toddlers
- public policies which support parents who remain at home to care for infants and toddlers
- professional recognition and training for caregivers of infants and toddlers
- financing adequate child care
- policy-relevant research issues concerning child care for very young children.

Addressing the child care needs of infants and toddlers and their families is a process that must involve parents; professionals; employers; voluntary, community and religious groups; and government, working together on behalf of our youngest citizens. Indeed it

is the National Center's conviction that this process is a national priority.

National Center staff is available to assist policy makers in locating research and clinical data which will help those seeking approaches to the urgent question, "Who will mind the babies?"

ROBERT MAUST

INFANTS AND TODDLERS NEED SPECIAL KINDS OF CARE

While children need careful nurturing throughout their development, infants and toddlers need care—both from parents and other adults—which is uniquely suited to their stage of life.

- The rapid physical growth and developmental changes of infancy require a responsive, flexible caring environment. Because infants do not have the ability to tolerate much discomfort or wait long for what they need, they require caregivers who can understand them and respond promptly. While toddlers are increasingly able to wait for and share adult attention, they require more vigilance for their safety and much support from adults in order to learn from play and to handle social situations.

- The "routines" of infant care—feeding, bathing, diapering, and comforting—are communications of utmost importance to the baby's cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. It is through these routines that the first human relationships are formed. When they are performed with sensitivity to the infant's individual rhythms and needs, it is more likely that the individual child will develop well. Perfunctory care or neglect may result in intellectual and physical stunting.

• The formation of loving attachments in the earliest years of life creates an emotional "root system" for future growth and development. Every child needs a solid relationship with one or two people in the family. If part of the child's care occurs outside the family, the infant or toddler also needs a continuous, affectionate relationship with a main caregiver during the years of infancy and toddlerhood—a caregiver who cooperates with the family on behalf of the child.

SUPPORTING PARENTS AS THEY CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Parents are the primary providers of care for children, and virtually every parent wishes to give his or her baby the best possible upbringing. American parents who have the task of raising future citizens through caring for infants and toddlers need both financial and emotional support.

Financial support for parents caring for infants

Several leading child development authorities suggest that a newborn remain in the care of a parent for at least four to six months after birth, for several reasons:

• Care at home minimizes the risk of infection to infants, and breastfeeding strengthens the infant's own defense against disease.

• New mothers and fathers do not become expert caregivers overnight. Developing a mutually satisfying relationship between an infant and parent takes time and continued effort by both parents and baby. Each new child born to a family requires this period of adjustment.

• Once parents and babies have established a solid attachment to each other, parents who return to work are more likely to be able to choose child care that is good for them and for the unique personality of their infant. Babies who have already learned to love and trust their parents are better able to form and use trusting and warm relationships with other adults.

- Satisfactory substitute care for very young infants is difficult to find and, as will be shown below, beyond the financial means of most young parents.

Currently, most women in our work force have no access to paid maternity leaves, a situation unheard of in almost all industrialized countries. Indeed, the severely circumscribed alternatives in this country combine to penalize stay-at-home parents, thus undermining the likelihood of such a choice. Not only do parents—almost always mothers—suffer the direct loss of income and benefits if they leave the labor force even temporarily to care for a baby, but they also risk lower pay and a lower position on the job ladder if they return to work.

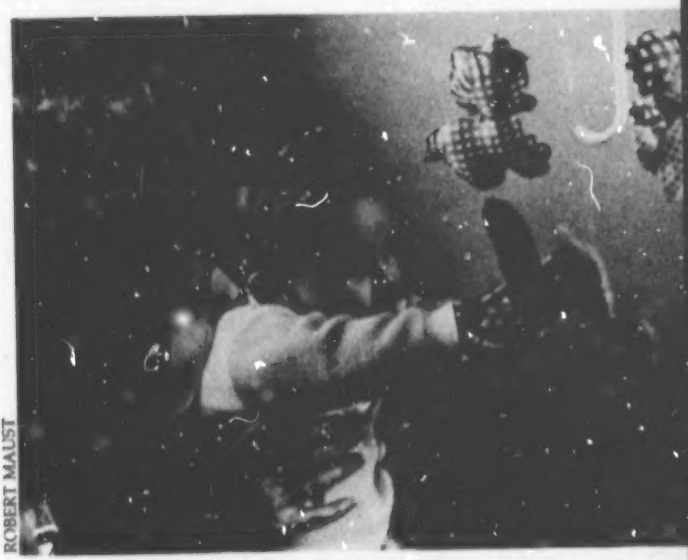
Public and private sector policies which would assist mothers and fathers who choose to care for their children full-time or to combine work and child care on a part-time basis include:

- paid infant-care leaves for parents
- flexible work schedules
- modified pension rules which give credit for approved infant-care leave
- Individual Retirement Accounts for homemakers
- more rigorous enforcement of child support orders.

Emotional and practical support

Whether they are struggling financially or well-to-do, today's parents of infants and toddlers often experience isolation, loneliness, and doubt about their ability to rear children successfully. In response to parents' concerns, hundreds of family support programs are springing up across the country. But their numbers remain insufficient to meet widespread needs.

Family support programs can be found in a variety of settings. Some include health care, crisis intervention and advocacy components. Others feature parent education classes, peer-support groups, information and referral, and parent-child joint activity groups. Many programs offer special support groups for single parents, divorced parents, older parents, parents of



ROBERT MAUST

children with handicaps, and parents in mourning for a lost child. Annual budgets range from $2,000 to more than $1 million. Some programs are operated solely by volunteers; others are 80% professionally staffed.

Diverse family support programs are already having a significant impact on American family life, particularly among families caring for infants and toddlers. But existing programs will be able to survive and new ones to begin and grow only if they can achieve a public commitment to their existence.

Collaboration among voluntary, private, and government agencies at the local, state and national levels is vital in order to provide:

- start-up and continuation money for family resource programs tailored to community needs
- networks of family resource programs which can assure that the experience of older, more established programs is shared with new ones
- research and evaluation of programs in this new movement to discern and improve areas of effectiveness.

GOOD SUPPLEMENTAL CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN UNDER THREE—WHAT IS IT?

Infant-care leaves and family support programs will help all parents. At the same time, increasing numbers of families with infants and toddlers also need supplemental care for their children. The urgency of the unmet need for adequate, affordable child care across the country and among all income groups has prompted the U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families to launch a national debate on child care policy. Former President Gerald Ford, Honorary Chairman of the Child Care Action Campaign, has declared "Today, universal access to quality child care is imperative in all our communities—urban and suburban, rural and industrial, middle-class and poor."

What constitutes "quality child care" for infants and toddlers? Good care for infants and toddlers may be provided by a relative or employee in the child's own home, by a family day care provider who cares for several children in her home or in a day care center which includes infants and toddlers. Whatever the caregiving setting, it is important, because of the unique aspects of infant and toddler development, that the care of children under three be regarded as a distinct activity rather than a scaled-down version of programs designed for children three to five.

- Infant and toddler programs must be aimed toward the individual needs of the babies and their families. Specialists in infancy and early childhood recognize that every child has a particular temperament and a unique style of exploring and responding to the world. These must be respected if the infant is to develop his special gifts.
- Human relationships are central to good quality care for very young children. It is important that infants and toddlers be able to know and trust the familiar, consistent adults who take care of them and that parents feel confident that their child is well cared for.
- Those providing care for infants and toddlers should be able to form affectionate attachments to children; knowledgeable about, and responsive to, ba-

bies' rapidly changing behavior and capabilities; able to communicate warmly with the child, both verbally and through physical closeness; and capable of working cooperatively with the family on the child's behalf over a period of years.

- Physical care must include adequate nourishment; careful attention to hygiene, especially for children in diapers; surroundings which are comfortable and safe, yet which encourage active exploration; and adults who feed, clean, and soothe babies gently and sensitively.

HOW CAN QUALITY CHILD CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS BE ASSURED?

Since children and families vary and since human relationships form such an important element of good child care, policymakers have struggled to find ways of assuring child care which could be broadly applied, yet not stifle needed diversity in programs. Regulation, accreditation, and consumer education are three approaches to this challenge.

Regulation

For years, policymakers concerned about setting—and enforcing—child care standards have looked for elements of group care for children which were not only associated with favorable outcomes for children but which could also be *measured* and *regulated*.

The 1979 National Day Care Study (NDCS) strongly suggested that small groups of children, a low child/staff ratio, and lead caregivers with training in child development were such regulatable elements. Based on the study's findings, the 1980 Day Care Regulations of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare required one staff member for every three children from birth to two years and one caregiver for every four 2-year-olds enrolled in center programs.

A 1981 survey of state day care regulations revealed, however, enormous variation in state requirements for infant-toddler care, with only one state conforming to the NDCS' recommended ratios. Cost is no doubt the major reason for the failure of NDCS findings to be reflected in state regulations. Since staff

salaries represent some 75% of most day care centers' budgets, programs faced with dwindling financial resources have been trying to reduce, rather than add to, their caregiving staff.

Currently a number of states are reviewing their infant-toddler child care regulations. They are looking at both day care centers and family day care homes, which serve more than half of all infants and toddlers in child care but remain largely unregulated.

The task of developing enforceable regulations for child care providers, bearing in mind the developmental needs of children, the demands of parents whose ability to earn a living depends on the availability and affordability of child care, and the concerns of both non-profit and for-profit providers is not an easy one. In addressing regulation issues, state and local policymakers and children's advocates may work toward:

- setting standards which reflect current research and recognize the serious damage which inadequate child care may cause to the development of young children
- altering licensing and registration processes for family day care homes to encourage the regulation of family day care providers; use of regulation procedures which encourage caregiver self-inspection, training opportunities for providers, and consumer education of parents.

Accreditation

A second approach to encouraging high quality child care is accreditation of centers. The Center Accreditation Project (CAP) of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which will begin in 1985, is such an effort. A voluntary effort, the Center Accreditation Project reflects public concern for high quality child care by:

- setting high standards of quality to which child care programs can aspire
- providing educational resources and networking opportunities to programs
- enhancing public awareness of and support for good quality child care.

BARBARA YOUNG

Consumer education

A third way to improve the quality of child care for infants and toddlers is to educate families to become discerning consumers of child care. Such efforts may take place under voluntary and/or public auspices and, like the family support movement, may represent a policy commitment to empower parents.

- Newspapers, magazines, radio and television are devoting increased time and space to discussion of child care needs, choices, and resources, particularly for infants and toddlers. Voluntary coalitions, such as the Child Care Action Campaign and the Family Resource Coalition, have spurred national media coverage of child care issues and have trained local family support groups to understand the use of media and bring their concerns to public attention.
- National, state, and local government agencies; professional organizations; and community service groups have developed a variety of guides for parents in choosing child care.
- Child care information and referral services now operate in several states, and legislation has been introduced in the Congress to fund demonstration projects nationwide. Parents who are informed about the child care choices available in their communities are better able to make good choices for their own children or to join with other families to fill unmet needs.

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND TRAINING OF CAREGIVERS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

However child care for infants and toddlers may be regulated, competent, well-trained caregivers remain the key to providing care which will foster children's development and strengthen families. Yet to those caring for very young children, our nation gives little professional recognition and financial rewards so meager as to discourage all but the dedicated or desperate from remaining in the field. The complexities of increasing the levels of compensation for infant-toddler caregivers will be addressed below. Professional recognition will be advanced, it is hoped, through the organizing efforts of child care workers themselves. In addition, increased opportunities for training and professional certification, combined with consumer education, may help to bring about needed change.

The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program has recognized that while many individual child care providers are well-attuned and responsive to the needs of infants and toddlers and have learned through life experiences to care competently for them, more training opportunities are needed to enable caregivers to increase their skill and understanding and to professionalize their work. CDA has worked to upgrade the standard of care for children from three to five years old by focusing on the skills of the caregiver and is currently expanding its assessment system to caregivers for infants and toddlers. Since more than half of the states now recognize the CDA credential as a qualification for employees in child care centers serving 3-5 year olds, it is hoped that CDA certification of infant-toddler caregivers will also become a national standard of competence.

However, since child care workers are the lowest paid of all human services professionals they will find it extremely difficult to upgrade their skills and achieve certification without some form of subsidy—at least until salaries in the profession increase substantially.

Training of caregivers for infants and toddlers must, in the immediate future at least, become a public pol-

icy concern. Again, pooling of resources and imaginative collaboration among government, professional organizations, credentialing bodies and educational institutions can help assure competent caregivers for very young children by:

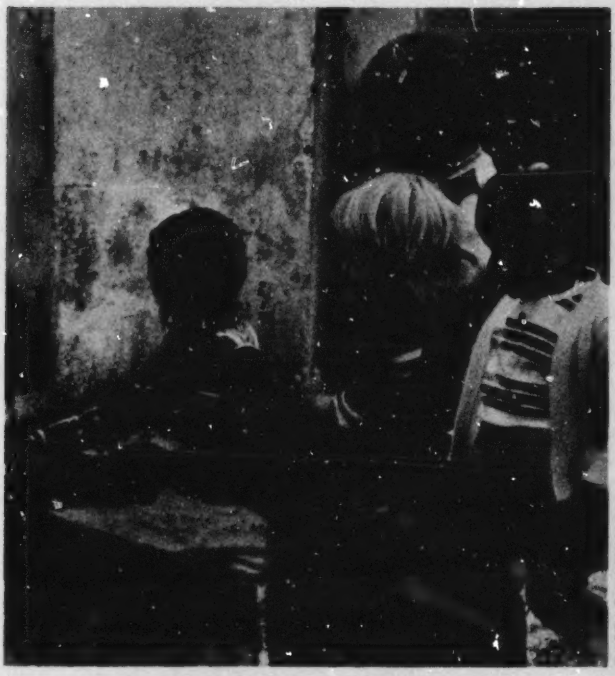
- certifying the competence of infant and toddler caregivers
- refining and disseminating the curricula available for training caregivers
- providing a variety of ongoing training opportunities for beginning and experienced caregivers, aimed both at upgrading providers' skills and keeping them abreast of new knowledge in a rapidly growing field
- providing sufficient financial subsidy for these efforts to make them affordable for child care workers and providers with limited resources.

JEAN BERLFEIN

FINANCING ADEQUATE CHILDCARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Economic factors contributing to the dearth of adequate, affordable child care for infants and toddlers are not difficult to understand. Maintaining a ratio of one caregiver to three children is costly. Attracting and *keeping* personnel is more expensive still. Even day care centers which charge $5,000 or more per year for infant care report that they do not recoup their costs; they accept babies in hopes that parents will keep them enrolled through the pre-school years, when larger group sizes are possible. Many providers simply shun care of infants and toddlers.

Family home day care for infants and toddlers, the most popular form of child care for this age group, presents providers, parents, and government with troubling economic conflicts. Parents are limited in their ability to pay for day care; consequently, provid-



BARBARA YOUNG

ers working 50 or more hours a week often earn substantially less than the minimum wage per hour. When a provider is restricted by state regulation—or her own wisdom—to accepting no more than two children under 2½ years of age in care, her earning potential is further curtailed. Although some jurisdictions which subsidize family home day care are beginning to pay providers a higher daily rate for infant and toddler care, the underlying situation is not easily remedied.

Current mechanisims of subsidizing child care for infants and toddlers, while often extremely effective for the population they serve, meet only a fraction of the need. At the federal level, dependent care tax credits do not help low-income families who owe no tax. Nor does this mechanism acknowledge that adequate care for infants and toddlers is more costly than that for older children. At the state level, child care allowances for AFDC mothers are often too small to purchase adequate care. Moreover, no licensing or monitoring of programs or family day care homes is provided for in such a system. Furthermore, reductions in Title XX Social Service Block Grant funds to states have severely limited states' ability to support quality child care. Many states have lowered their child care standards in recent years in order to stretch Title XX dollars. While several hundred employers have begun to support child care services in imaginative ways, including on-site child care, vouchers or payments to existing providers and information and referral systems, they still represent only a tiny percentage of the country's businesses.

As bi-partisan Congressional leadership has recognized, efforts of federal government, state governments, employers and communities will be needed to find ways of addressing urgent child care needs, particularly in a time of high deficits. Some measures which would have major implications for very young children and their families include:

- paid infant care leave for parents of newborns as a possibly less costly alternative to group care for the very youngest infants
- recognition, in tax credits and subsidy rates, that

adequate care for infants and toddlers is more expensive than care for older children

- sliding fee scales in publicly supported and voluntary child care programs, so that families who prosper and no longer need total subsidy can pay for care as they become able to do so while keeping their children in a familiar setting

- financial support for training and certifying caregivers for infants and toddlers, with thought for ways to achieve higher levels of compensation for the child care profession as a whole.

POLICY RELEVANT RESEARCH CONCERNING INFANT-TODDLER CHILD CARE

In recent years, careful longitudinal studies have shown that meticulously planned and well-staffed center-based programs for infants and toddlers *can* foster the healthy development of very young children and provide significant psychological support to parents as well. But since only a small percentage of infants and toddlers are enrolled in the few such programs available, we do not know in any systematic way what child care arrangements other parents are making for their infants; how young children fare in family day care homes, which vary widely in quality; or what the impact is on infants and toddlers of less than optimal or adverse child care settings. Furthermore, concern about the health consequences of group care for infants has generated debate about the extent to which early group care increases a baby's risk of infection. Careful consideration by pediatricians and epidemiologists will be needed in order for such issues to be aired and resolved.

Attempts to address the pressing need for child care for infants and toddlers must not be postponed while we await conclusive research findings, yet research studies and policy analyses likely to inform long-term decision-making in these areas deserve governmental, academic, and foundation support. These might include:

- a survey of current day care choices and arrange-

ments of working mothers with infants under six months of age which would ascertain the real situation facing working families with infants today

- an analysis of the potential pitfalls, as well as the benefits involved, in offering paid leaves to parents for infant care, which would serve as a guide to policymakers in both the public and private sectors

- research on how infants, toddlers and their families fare using the undistinguished child care available to most consumers. This is essential to reveal the existence, if any, of negative outcomes of poor quality day care on health, cognition or personality development that do not occur in a child who receives high quality care.

CONCLUSION

"Who will mind the babies?" has become an urgent question in this age of two paycheck and single parent families. Whereas day care for children three years and older has been provided at various times in this country's history and under varying auspices, planned efforts to provide a spectrum of family support and child care services geared to the developmental needs of infants, toddlers and their parents would represent a new commitment to the well-being of our country's youngest citizens and to the nation's own future.

The issues which must be addressed if such efforts are to succeed are many, and not easily resolved. Yet the clock is already ticking for the infants of the 1980's. Time will not wait for us to begin to meet their needs.

The National Center for Clinical Infant Programs hopes to join you in working on behalf of very young children and their families. Our staff is available to provide you with more detailed information about infant and toddler child care issues and resources as well as about other areas of infant health, mental health and development. We can also put you in touch with scholars, researchers, clinicians and program developers across the country who share these concerns.

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